

An Outsider Among Outsiders by **fieldofyellowdandelions**

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Summary:

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Author's Note:

- For [delgaserasca](#).

May 1, 2003

Hawkins, Indiana

Mike had been back in town for nearly three months before he decided to drop by to visit Will. Will tries not to be too hurt. After all, that would be pretty hypocritical of him considering he had just as much opportunity to visit Mike and choose not to.

“Can I come in?” Mike asks.

“Sure.” Will replies and holds the door open for him, which Mike closes after he steps through and wipes off his shoes. Mike’s always been a considerate bastard. Because he can be considerate too, Will offers a beer and, after Mike politely declines, grabs himself one before heading into the living room. Will mutes MSNBC and leaves President Bush silently mouthing his speech he’s delivering from the deck of an aircraft carrier with a banner announcing “Mission Accomplished” strung up behind him.

Will sits back down on the couch and, after a moment, Mike joins him, settling down into the love seat. The house probably hasn’t changed much since the last time Mike was here because the house hasn’t changed much period. After the encounter with the demogorgon, the house had been in rough shape and Joyce had managed to set aside some money to repair the damage left behind. The hole in the wall had been properly fixed, the wallpaper replaced and the carpet replaced but nothing had really been updated since the late 1980s.

An awkward silence descends upon the pair before Mike finally says, “I’m sorry to hear about your mom.”

Will’s mom had been the reason he had moved back to Hawkins in the first place. He never had intended to return but his mom had gotten sick. She had needed someone to drive her into the city for her

oncologist appointments and chemo treatments, as well as just someone to keep her company. Will knew that Jonathan felt guilty for not dropping everything and coming instead even though he had a career and a family and Will... didn't. And it was no real hardship for Will. One minimum wage job looks much the same as another.

Besides, Will didn't just love his mom, as most children love their parents, but he liked her as a person. She was funny and smart and just a little bit of a nerd too. In the morning, after Will had gotten home from the night shift at the gas station, his mom would shuffle out into the living room and settle down onto the couch. They might light up a joint if Joyce was feeling particularly nauseas or Will would put together a light breakfast if she wasn't. Then Will would put a VHS in and they'd chat about buying a DVD player while the trailers played. They watched *Lord of the Rings* a lot, not only because they both loved it and also because, more often than not, they'd both fall asleep before it was time to put in the second tape.

Despite the rest of the shit that had been going on, those had been good mornings. Will missed them.

"I'm sorry I wasn't here." Mike goes on, "I wish I had been here for the funeral."

Will shrugs because he's not upset. It's not Mike's fault he had to rely on the Hawkin's grapevine, since Will hadn't the time or inclination to call him up and tell him in the person. To be fair, Will had other things on his mind at the time and, honestly, it hadn't even occurred to him to tell Mike.

After graduation Will and Mike had drifted apart or, rather, continued to drift apart because, if Will was honest with himself, the drifting had started long before graduation. It started before Will had even returned from the Upside-Down.

Will only calls it the Upside-Down because that is what Mike called it that and he only called it that because that's what Eleven called it. Will doesn't think he gave it a name when he was there, is pretty sure he was too busy not dying, but he can't be positive. The time Will spent in the Upside-Down is like a vague memory. Not quite like a dream. More like a childhood story that your parents have retold so many times that you're not sure if you remember it happening or just

think you do.

Will does remember that life had been normal afterward, at least on the surface: Saturdays spent playing D & D, bike rides and school dances. But underneath, everything had shifted. Like putting on your favorite jacket from last year and finding you had outgrown it. Things just didn't fit anymore and they drifted. First, Dustin moved away from Hawkins with his family while they were still in middle school. Then, Lucas migrated to a different group of friends in high school. Will and Mike were good friends up until graduation when Mike and Will went off to different colleges. The truth is time and distance can weaken the strongest of bonds and theirs had already been fading. Your best friend at 12 is very unlikely to be your best friend at 32 and by the time the funeral happened, they hadn't been in contact with each other at all. The last time Will had seen Mike in person had been Mike's wedding where Will had attended but hadn't been in the wedding party. Even then, they had drifted too far for that and it was the last time Will saw Mike in person.

Until today, of course.

"Lucas is back in town." Mike says, changing the subject to what he really came here to talk about.

Will makes a noise of agreement because knows. He saw him the other day at the grocery store. They didn't make eye contact. Will wasn't even sure if Lucas saw him or would recognize him if he did.

"And Dustin emailed me yesterday." Mike says, "That's weird, right?"

"That's weird." Will agrees. It is weird. But also, not surprising. Will doesn't feel surprised at all.

Because while Will might have managed to leave the Upside-Down physically, he never really escaped it. It is always there no matter wherever Will goes, caught in his periphery, an optical illusion that once seen can't be unseen. He had hoped that, much like the slugs that he had vomited up, it would subside in time, but it hasn't. The Upside-Down is just as present today as it was 20 years ago. And it was always the same: cold, dark, and empty. Until it wasn't.

Because, ever since Will has been back in Hawkins, things have been different. At first, he hadn't noticed. He'd been busy first with looking after his mom and then the funeral and then helping his brother settle the estate. It was only once it was all done and Jonathan had gone home and Will was alone in the house, still sleeping on his twin bed, with his feet dangling over the end when he stretched out, because he couldn't bear to sleep in his mom's bed, did he start to sense it.

The Upside-Down had begun to pulse with anticipation. Anticipation for what, Will wasn't quite sure. But Will was back in Hawkins and so were Mike and Lucas. And Dustin was no doubt on his way. He was sure they'd find out soon enough.